

## Key Findings

### **IT Collaboration: Multi-Institutional Partnerships to Develop, Manage, and Operate IT Resources**

*Philip J. Goldstein and Judith A. Pirani*

Cooperation is a hallmark of the higher education information technology (IT) community. There is a tremendous willingness to share information, ideas, and solutions among institutions and individual IT leaders in higher education. Largely unfettered by the competitive forces that limit cooperation between corporations, colleges and universities cooperate extensively within regional and mission-centered peer groups. We have no doubt that nearly all institutions share expertise and advice.

Recently, this cooperation has spurred intense interest in collaborations among institutions to solve common technology problems. For example, institutions collaborate to operate regional networks, maintain shared data centers, and support shared enterprise applications. Higher education's emerging vision of a research cyberinfrastructure is predicated on the extensive sharing of tools, talent, instruments, and data.

Collaboration, however, is more than an exchange of ideas. It can be difficult and time-consuming, requiring formal pooling of resources, sharing risk, and relinquishing control to a joint effort to meet a shared objective. The life cycle of a collaboration encompasses many stages, from identification of a need and the selection of partners to the formation, management, and sustenance of the actual collaboration. Success or failure can occur at any one of these stages. Institutions may approach collaboration in different ways. Some view collaboration as an essential strategy for higher education to gain the benefits of scale to help control IT costs. Others view collaboration as a means to augment the commercial marketplace with additional solution options. Still others see collaboration as a means for smaller or less wealthy institutions to access the expertise and advanced technology enjoyed by larger institutions. But when executed effectively, the benefits of collaboration to an IT organization and to an institution can be significant.

Recognizing the increasing interest in collaboration, the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) has published *IT Collaboration: Multi-Institutional Partnerships to Develop, Manage, and Operate IT Resources*, a research study of multi-institutional collaboration to inform decision making about how and when to collaborate. We sought to understand the breadth of institutional IT collaboration and discover those collaborative practices associated with good outcomes. We studied

---

a wide array of topics, including the types of institutions that collaborate, technology areas that are conducive to collaboration, goals and barriers that drive or limit enthusiasm for collaboration, steps that institutions take to evaluate collaboration opportunities, and approaches that institutions take to manage and sustain collaboration.

## Defining Collaboration

Cooperation and collaboration are different concepts and experiences. Both entail joint effort and communication, but collaboration requires participants to surrender greater resources and control. It often involves the creation of a separate entity to oversee or perform the collaborative activities. Collaborations often become organizations and cultures unto themselves. Our study recognizes these differences, and ECAR elected to focus only on the more intensive interactions of collaboration in *IT Collaboration: Multi-Institutional Partnerships to Develop, Manage, and Operate IT Resources*. We study four forms of collaboration, categorized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Categories of Collaboration Forms**

Category	Collaboration Form
Develop IT resource	Partnerships to develop an IT resource
Provide shared services	Shared service collaborations in which multiple organization band together to jointly operate an IT resource
Provide another institution	Collaborations in which one institution elects to operate an IT service on behalf of others
Receive IT resource	Collaborations in which an institution is a recipient of services provided by another institution

Because collaboration involves the sharing of risk, we also focused our study on collaborations that involve only essential IT resources. We wanted to learn from collaborations in which the participants face real risk if they fail. Our thought was that these collaborations would be more indicative of what is truly required to sustain and succeed at collaboration. For the purposes of this study, we defined an essential IT resource to mean any service, tool, or application for which reliability and quality are of paramount importance to the collaborating institutions, to a significant number of users at the collaborating institutions, or to a critically important group of users.

## Methodology

ECAR pursued a multipart research approach to this study. We began with a literature review, examining prior research on the factors that differentiate successful collaborations, specialized collaborations in nonprofit organizations or government agencies, practitioners' guides for structuring effective collaborations, and specialized collaborations to develop software. Through this, we identified issues and developed research questions.

Next, we administered a Web-based screening survey of 586 institutions among the EDUCAUSE membership to identify collaborators and non-collaborators. We engaged in two detailed follow-up

Web surveys that asked tailored questions of 157 institutions presently engaged in at least one form of collaboration and a second with tailored questions for 113 institutions who have elected not to participate in any IT collaborations at this time.

Each respondent to the collaborators survey was asked to respond to a set of questions pertaining to their most significant collaboration. These questions were designed to assess how practices such as governance, decision making, member selection, and communications occur in each collaboration and how these practices contribute to good outcomes. The non-collaborators survey inquired about the reasons the institution has not engaged in IT collaborations and their plans for future collaborations.

We supplemented the quantitative research with postsurvey qualitative phone interviews with IT leaders from 30 institutions including both collaborators and non-collaborators. Finally, we consulted with a select group of CIOs who are extensively engaged in collaboration, to help frame our analysis and validate our conclusions

## Significant Findings

The image that emerges in *IT Collaboration: Multi-Institutional Partnerships to Develop, Manage, and Operate IT Resources* is a community comprising two groups: collaborators, who are committed to partnerships with other institutions as a valued strategy to cost-effectively develop or deliver IT resources, and non-collaborators, who are open-minded about the potential of collaboration but are wary of the costs and complexities to engage in it. In the following sections, we summarize and synthesize our findings.

### Contrasting Collaborators and Non-Collaborators

Of the 586 respondents to our screening survey, we found that 68.8 percent are engaged in at least one form of collaboration involving an essential IT resource. A follow-on survey of 157 institutions that collaborate reveals that multi-institutional partnerships to provide IT resources is the most prevalent form of collaboration (71.3 percent of respondents). This is followed by respondents who receive an IT resource from another institution (66.9 percent), respondents who are the sole provider of IT resources to other institutions (43.9 percent), and respondents engaged in collaborations to develop an IT resource (40.1 percent). Many respondents are engaged in more than one of these four forms of collaboration.

Interestingly, we found the decision to engage in collaboration is shaped considerably by the environment in which the decision maker sits. Among the populations we surveyed, we found strong differences between the institutions that do collaborate and those that do not. The collaborators we studied were primarily public institutions with Carnegie classifications of doctoral or master's institutions. The non-collaborators were the mirror image. They were predominantly smaller, private institutions, and the largest segments were bachelor's and master's institutions.

The two populations also differed significantly in the value they place on innovation and experimentation in administrative operations. Using a 5-point agreement scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement, collaborators assessed their institutions to

be much more interested in administrative innovation than did non-collaborators. Collaborators had a mean level of agreement of 3.56 with the statement “My institution places a high value on innovation in administrative operations.” The mean agreement among non-collaborators was 3.28. Likewise, collaborators were more confident that their institutions place a high value on managers who are entrepreneurial. Collaborators’ mean response to this statement was 3.63, while non-collaborators’ mean response was 3.37. Among collaborators, 22.4 percent see their institutions as innovators or early adopters of new management strategies. Conversely, only 7.2 percent of non-collaborators see their institutions as holding similarly aggressive adoption philosophies.

## Forms and Focus of Collaboration

Among collaborators, the most prevalent form of collaboration is shared services. Seventy-one percent of respondents are engaged in collaborations to jointly operate a shared IT resource. The least common form is partnerships to develop an IT resource, although there are still 40 percent of respondents actively engaged in this form of collaboration. We found that most collaborators (56 percent) are engaged in at least two forms of collaboration.

The technology areas in which respondents collaborate are fairly consistent across all four forms of collaboration. We found greater collaborative activity in areas in which institutions arguably have more common needs, such as network infrastructure, enterprise systems, learning management systems, and disaster recovery. Some of the lowest participation rates can be explained by the nature of the technology area. For example, only 7.1 percent of respondents reported engagement in collaborations to develop a data center. While the future may see more collaboration in this area, it is understandable that few today are engaged in joint projects to build data centers. The expense and complexity of this form of project present significant hurdles to individual campuses. As Table 2 illustrates, the focus of collaboration did not vary much by form of collaboration.

**Table 2. Areas of Collaboration, by Form of Collaboration**

Area	Provide Shared Service (N = 104)	Develop IT Resource (N = 56)	Receive IT Resource (N = 85)	Provide Another Institution (N = 54)
Network infrastructure	62.6%	43.1%	62.6%	63.3%
Enterprise information systems	64.2%	61.4%	58.4%	58.6%
Learning management systems	55.1%	41.8%	44.8%	45.5%
Enterprise directory/identity management	35.0%	30.0%	26.7%	41.5%
Disaster recovery/business continuity	37.9%	26.8%	23.5%	32.7%
Data center	25.2%	7.1%	21.8%	31.5%
Instructional technology	35.3%	25.0%	19.5%	30.0%
Help desk/user support	21.0%	11.1%	14.6%	29.4%
IT security	35.9%	30.9%	21.2%	24.0%
Research computing	19.2%	19.6%	21.7%	14.3%

We also found no area to be completely devoid of collaborative activity. Each form of collaboration had at least some activity in each technology area. It appears the institutions in aggregate are pursuing a fairly broad collaboration agenda.

## Drivers for and Barriers to Collaborating

Institutions pursue collaboration as a means to control costs, enhance service, and gain access to better technology. These were among the most frequently identified reasons to collaborate across all forms of collaboration by the respondents to our survey. Many also engage in IT collaborations to align with a broader commitment their institutions have made to collaborate with others. Some, but not all, of these respondents are public institutions that are leveraging opportunities or complying with mandates to work with sister campuses in a state system of higher education. Other institutions simply place higher importance on collaboration. When respondents elect not to collaborate, it is most often because the benefits are uncertain, the start-up costs are too great, or the collaboration is not aligned with their own strategic priorities.

Non-collaborators have not pursued collaboration because they view the benefits as too uncertain or the risks as too great to justify the added costs of collaboration. They often see their own IT capabilities as offering as good or superior benefits to collaboration without the added transaction costs to sustain a complex partnership. Others lack suitable partners. Table 3 and Table 4 list the most frequent drivers for and barriers to collaboration, by collaboration type.

**Table 3. Top-Three Reasons for Engaging in Collaboration, by Collaboration Type**

Reason	Provide Shared Service (N = 104)	Develop IT Resource (N = 56)	Receive IT Resource (N = 85)	Provide Another Institution (N = 54)
Reduce cost/gain efficiencies	55.4%	24.2%	47.1%	26.1%
Enhance IT service	40.1%	24.8%	31.8%	20.4%
Broad institutional commitment to collaboration	28.0%	10.8%	18.5%	20.4%
Access better technology	21.7%	13.4%	21.0%	7.6%
Speed implementation	13.4%	11.5%	8.3%	6.4%
Decrease reliance on commercial solution providers	12.7%	7.0%	5.1%	5.1%
Comply with mandate	12.1%	6.4%	15.9%	7.0%
Access scarce IT skills	11.5%	7.6%	12.1%	4.5%
Complete onetime project more effectively	5.7%	5.7%	2.5%	1.9%

**Table 4. Top-Three Reasons Respondents Are Not Engaged in Collaboration, by Collaboration Type**

Reason	Provide Shared Service (N = 45)	Develop IT Resource (N = 94)	Receive IT Resource (N = 52)	Provide Another Institution (N = 88)
Lack of adequate funding	35.6%	37.2%	11.5%	34.1%
Insufficient benefits	26.7%	38.3%	40.4%	33.0%
Other	17.8%	35.1%	9.6%	31.8%
Lack alignment with institutional priorities	37.8%	27.7%	21.2%	25.0%
Lack of suitable partners	13.3%	8.5%	15.4%	14.8%
Technology issues	11.1%	7.4%	11.5%	11.4%
Too much risk	6.7%	12.8%	13.5%	10.2%
More confident in own capabilities	31.1%	17.0%	46.2%	9.1%
Lack institutional leaders' support	17.8%	8.5%	5.8%	9.1%
Difficulty structuring agreements	17.8%	11.7%	17.3%	8.0%
Lack expertise managing collaboration	13.3%	7.4%	3.8%	6.8%
Competitive considerations	2.2%	1.1%	3.8%	3.4%
Failed prior attempt	6.7%	1.1%	3.8%	1.1%

## Courting and Choosing a Partner

The academic literature often uses the language of personal relationships to describe collaboration. Terms such as *courting*, *dating*, and *marriage* are used metaphorically to describe the stages of organizational collaboration. Higher education IT leaders appear to view their collaborations through a similar lens. Nearly 85 percent of respondents to the collaborators survey agreed that they collaborate with institutional leaders with whom they have a long-standing professional relationship. However, this is not the only factor that goes into selecting a partner. Collaborators are also looking for partners that will be recognized by their institution (similar mission) and who seek similar benefits from a collaboration. Secondly, respondents are looking for someone who is like them. Slightly more than 40 percent of respondents told us they choose partners they have relationships with and that are from institutions similar to their own. The tertiary set of factors has to do with the quality of the prospective partner. Between 20 and 30 percent of respondents appear to place an emphasis on understanding potential partners' technology capability, IT staff skills, and willingness to share risk.

For now, it appears that personal relationship takes the place of formal vetting of collaboration partners. Only 23.6 percent agreed that they formally vet their collaboration partners. Interestingly, we found no significant difference in approach to vetting partners between public and private institutions or between those who were or were not part of a higher education system. It appears that even those outside the natural peer groups created by public systems are finding partners that they feel they know well enough and do not need to vet in any formal manner.

## Operating and Managing the Collaboration

When designing the research methods for *IT Collaboration: Multi-Institutional Partnerships to Develop, Manage, and Operate IT Resources*, we wanted to include a mechanism to understand how institutions structure and operate their collaborations and what impact those choices have on their performance and ultimate success. To accomplish this, we included in the collaborators survey a set of detailed questions about respondents' most significant collaborations. When creating these questions, we drew from the research of the Wilder Foundation, which has identified 20 success factors through its study of successful collaborations across industries. Wilder converted these factors—focusing on environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communications, purpose, and resources—into self-assessment questions that collaborators can use to judge the health of their own collaborations. Following are some results of our detailed analysis in the areas of governance, formal agreements, decision making, and communications of the collaboration case studies as described by the respondents.

The formality of oversight that institutions have adopted for their most essential collaborations spans a continuum from informal cooperation to legally separate entities with formal governance structures. Many respondents (42.2 percent) reported that their collaboration is governed by a formal mechanism that specifies how decisions get made. Similar numbers of respondents reported either no formal governance (22.1 percent) or reliance on informal means of governance (19.5 percent). The smallest number of respondents (13.6 percent) reported that their collaboration has taken the step to create a separate legal entity to govern their collaboration. The formality of governance appears to be influenced mostly by the nature of the collaboration. The choice of formal governance seems more likely driven by collaborations that engage numerous institutions (such as shared services and development projects) or by those that require formal legal structures to facilitate fund-raising or hiring of staff.

More than 88 percent of respondents reported that their collaborations achieve a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, regardless of specific structure and form. The majority (67.4 percent) have documented policies and procedures. In contrast, significantly fewer (33.6 percent) have gone beyond policies to draft formal bylaws. The collaborations that do have bylaws likely require them to create a separately incorporated entity to oversee the collaboration. The portion of respondents with boards to oversee their collaboration (48.6 percent) far exceeds the portion that has formed a separate legal entity to manage the collaboration (13.6 percent). Thus, many have adopted boards not because they have to (as required to establish a new legal entity) but because they find them effective.

Creating formal agreements is another important means of achieving clarity of purpose, clear lines of authority, and roles, and the existence of such agreements is important to the success of a collaboration. Three-quarters of respondents reported that their collaborations are governed by some form of an agreement. The most common form is a memorandum of understanding signed by the parties involved in the collaboration. Nearly one-fifth of respondents (19 percent) have created detailed legal documents with comprehensive terms and conditions. The collaborators' familiarity with one another also has little influence on the nature of the agreement. Respondents who are part of university systems (and presumably collaborating with institutions they know) and those who believe strongly that they partner with IT leaders they know were no more or less likely to use formal

agreements than other respondents. The form of agreement selected likely flows most directly from the choice of governance structure. Overall, respondents feel their agreements perform best at delineating the financial contributions of the parties involved in the collaboration and least well at delineating the risks borne by each party. More than three-quarters (85.5 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that their agreements clearly specify the financial contributions required of each party. In contrast, 44.5 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that their agreements make clear each party's risks.

Respondents to the collaborators survey were generally satisfied that they had put in place agreements and structures that defined how decision making would occur. The majority of our respondents reported significant trust among the participants in their collaborations and willingness among the participants to compromise. More than 60 percent also agreed that they have structured their decision-making processes to allow sufficient time for participants to be consulted before a decision needs to be made. It appears that a key factor influencing respondents' satisfaction with decision making appears to be whether their collaborations have agreed to a common set of objectives. Respondents without shared objectives encounter greater difficulty in decision making than those with shared objectives. We observed no significant difference in respondents' assessments of decision making by type of collaboration or authority model (degree of centralization of authority). Nor did the respondents' roles in the collaboration alter their perceptions of decision making.

Frequent and effective communication is a prerequisite for any complex project within an institution. Collaboration introduces another level of complexity, as each partner brings a unique culture and local methods to the collaboration. The majority of respondents reported that they are well-informed and believe the partners in their collaborations communicate frequently with stakeholders. The majority of respondents also believe their collaboration partners represent individuals who are empowered to speak for their institutions and facilitate efficient decision making. We also observed no significant difference in collaborators' assessments of their communications' effectiveness based on type of collaboration or authority model. The respondents' roles in the collaboration (founder versus participant) also did not influence their assessments of communication. Finally, the presence of a full-time executive staff also did not influence respondents' assessments of the effectiveness of communication.

## Evaluation and Success

More than 80 percent of respondents to our collaborators survey are engaged in significant IT collaborations that are intended to be sustained far into the future. Very few are engaged in short-term collaborations intended to solve a particular problem and then disband. As a result, our group of respondents is highly motivated to find effective means to build sustainable collaborations that reach their full potential. The hurdles they face are high. Collaborations have all the risks of any complex project and then some. Like all projects, they are vulnerable to inadequate resources, unclear or unreasonable expectations, poor leadership, and technical problems. They also face the added challenge of needing to forge new partnerships, structures, and work methods that bind together individuals from different organizations.

Consequently, respondents engage in a broad set of activities to evaluate the quality of a collaboration opportunity. The most frequently performed activities are to evaluate the onetime and

recurring costs of the collaboration. The least frequently performed activities are developing a set of quantifiable objectives for the collaboration and measuring baseline service levels (pre-collaboration). About one-third of respondents do not perform one or both of these activities.

Given a collaboration’s high stakes, we were eager to understand what attributes of collaboration are related to good outcomes. We found 11 attributes that appear to influence success. Collaborations with formal governance, including bylaws and structured agreements, also tend to be more successful. Likewise, participants in collaborations that sustain frequent communication, keep decision makers well-informed, and use metrics to convey the benefits they achieve are also more satisfied with the outcomes of these collaborations. In the area of decision making, collaborations that demonstrate willingness to compromise and allow sufficient time for their participants to consult their own institutions before making a decision also reported better outcomes. All of these elements build trust and shared objectives among the participants. These latter two factors may be at the heart of what makes a collaboration succeed. Table 5 summarizes the factors that relate to better outcomes from collaboration.

**Table 5. Summary of Factors That Relate to Successful Collaborations**

Area	Factors
Governance	Governing board
	Written bylaws
Agreements	Formal agreement
	Clear delineation of risk
	Definition of financial responsibilities of all parties
	Specification of decision-making authority
Communications	Frequent communications
	Informed decision makers and sponsors
	Regular measurement of benefits
Decision making	Willingness to compromise
	Sufficient time for decision makers to consult with their institutions

We were struck by the level of satisfaction respondents have with the success of their collaborations. Sixty-five percent of collaborators reported that their most significant collaboration is meeting its stated objectives. Another 23 percent believe their collaborations are exceeding or significantly exceeding expectations. The majority of respondents believe that participation in their most significant collaboration is saving them money and enhancing their institution’s technology capability.

Our analysis of success factors was reinforced by examining failed collaborations. Among collaborators, 21 percent of respondents were also involved in collaborations that failed to meet their stated objectives or dissolved prematurely. The primary reasons for failure were the flip side of the factors that led to success. The most frequently reported causes of failed collaborations include ineffective governance, differing objectives among participants, ineffective leadership, and insufficient communications.

## Enticing Non-Collaborators to Collaborate

Non-collaborators have not closed the door on participating in future collaborations. Most have not made a strategic or philosophical decision to reject collaboration in all cases; more hold neutral rather than negative opinions about the benefits of collaboration. The majority are open to using noncommercial software or receiving an IT service from another institution. They also are not denying the need to try new methods. They anticipate that across higher education there will be greater use of outsourcing and collaboration within IT organizations. Interestingly, non-collaborators believe their institutions would be more likely to outsource to a corporation than join a collaboration. This may indicate that their institutions consider outsourcing to be a more proven approach.

We asked non-collaborators several questions designed to reveal their level of openness to collaboration with other institutions. Table 6 summarizes their responses. Specifically, we wanted to know if they

- believe an institution should always self-operate its essential IT resources,
- are opposed to anything other than commercially vended software,
- trust outsourcing to corporations more than to another institution, or
- are confident their IT organizations have the skills to contribute to collaborations.

**Table 6. Respondents' Openness to Collaboration**

Statement	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Institutions should always independently operate an essential IT resource.	112	2.80	0.928
My institution would be more likely to agree to receive an essential IT resource from a corporation than another institution.	112	3.12	1.011
My institution would only use software solutions developed by a commercial provider.	113	2.63	1.019
My institution lacks sufficient technical skills to contribute to a partnership with another institution to develop an essential IT resource.	112	2.82	1.224

\*Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Our research revealed that non-collaborators are looking for collaboration to become a more compelling option in their own and their institutions' eyes. It is more likely that they have yet to encounter a collaborative opportunity with enough benefits to outweigh their concerns about the risks and costs.

So what would entice non-collaborators to collaborate? We found that most would be more likely to collaborate if the perceived risk were lessened. This is not surprising, given that respondents to the non-collaborators survey are at institutions that are less likely to take risks and that follow an

intentional strategy to be later adopters of management and technological innovations. Respondents seek opportunities to work with institutions that are more like their own, an approach that likely would provide greater confidence that institutions are entering into collaboration with partners who would share their objectives and goals. Respondents also seek more concrete evidence of the benefits of collaboration. Nearly 90 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more likely to receive an IT resource from collaboration if there were documented evidence of the benefits. It is logical that greater certainty of benefits would make anyone more likely to adopt a particular strategy. Fifty-five percent of non-collaborators are open to receiving an IT resource from another institution, but no one has approached them to offer such a resource.

## The Promise and Future of Collaboration

Collaborators and non-collaborators both anticipate a future in which more institutions pursue collaboration. Perhaps because of the cost pressures and service demands they face, nearly three-quarters of the respondents to the collaborators survey believe that there will be significantly more multi-institutional collaborations. In fact, 74 percent of the respondents agreed that constrained funding would drive institutions to greater engagement in collaborations.

Collaborators anticipate expanding the breadth of their engagement in collaborations. Perhaps in anticipation of increasing gaps in the availability of commercial solutions tailored to higher education, most collaborators (75 percent) project they will become more engaged in collaborations to develop IT resources. A somewhat smaller but still significant number of respondents (55 percent) project they will provide IT services to other institutions. A similar number (53 percent) anticipate they will receive expanded services from other institutions.

Collaborators are also confident in their readiness to take on more collaboration. Respondents believe they have the senior leadership backing, technology infrastructure, and management practices to facilitate greater collaboration. They are somewhat less confident in the readiness of two areas outside of their direct control—human resource practices and legal practices. Respondents assessed the readiness of both these areas to support expanded collaboration at lower levels than they did their own technical and managerial readiness. IT leaders will need to work more extensively with these two important functions to develop policies and practices more conducive to collaboration.

As one would expect, non-collaborators are less confident in their readiness to pursue an agenda of collaboration. They had significantly lower assessments of their senior leadership support and the readiness of their institutions' human resource practices, legal practices, technical infrastructure, and management practices. However, there are several areas of technology operations that non-collaborators believe are future candidates for collaboration. These include research computing, learning management systems, and disaster recovery. Interestingly, non-collaborators seem most committed to continued self-operation for infrastructure services such as data centers and networks. These are areas that many collaborators believe are prime opportunities for future collaborations.

## Conclusion

IT collaboration is at a crossroads. Whether it will remain an important but niche strategy for meeting some technology needs or become a widely adopted method for providing broad technology services

is difficult to predict. Those who have engaged in collaboration are strikingly satisfied with the outcomes they have achieved. They hold strong beliefs that they are achieving benefits that more than compensate for the added complexity of collaborating.

But higher education has a way to go before we can consider multi-institutional collaborations to be a widely adopted strategy for developing, delivering, and managing IT resources. Despite the promise seen by those active in collaborations, many non-collaborators remain cautious and skeptical. Collaboration on a wider scale will require greater evidence of its costs and benefits, different methods of organizing to broaden the reach of collaboration, and capital to fund its expansion.

In many respects, our community needs collaboration to succeed on a wider scale. The institutions and individuals the IT organization serves are growing more collaborative. Institutions are developing degree programs that span institutional borders. Researchers are working across disciplines, campuses, and countries. Students are pursuing their degrees by combining multiple institutions' online and in-person offerings. All look to technology organizations to facilitate their frictionless movement between institutions and environments. Solving these problems is not the work of one institution. It will require a collaborative effort. Closer to home, IT organizations continue to face pressures to expand their services, maintain a reliable infrastructure, and control their costs. Most IT budgets are already stretched thin by rising maintenance costs for existing technology. Few resources are available for innovation and expansion. With public pressure mounting on higher education to contain tuition increases, relief likely won't be coming from institutional budgets. So, IT organizations need new ways of doing things. Collaboration offers promise that is worth further exploration.

*Philip J. Goldstein and Judith A. Pirani are Fellows with the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research.*

---

*A copy of the full study referenced above will be available via subscription or purchase through the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research ([www.educause.edu/ecar/](http://www.educause.edu/ecar/)).*

---